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UNCLAS ALGIERS 001003

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MORE ALGERIAN JOURNALISTS SENTENCED TO PRISON

REF: ALGIERS 918

1. Fouad Boughanem and Reda Belhadjouja have been found guilty of defamation for an article that appeared in 2003 in Le Soir d'Algerie. Each was sentenced to two months in jail and 250,000DA fine (US\$3,427). In addition, the newspaper has been fined 250,000DA (US\$3,427). Boughamen is the publication director for Le Soir d'Algerie, and Belhadjouja is the author of the article which was written under the pen name of Hakim Laalam. Neither man is in prison pending appeal. The article contained a satirical criticism of President Bouteflika and the justices who invalidated the eighth FLN party congress. It is written in a very non-professional journalistic manner.

2. At one time Belhadjouja also had a radio show in Algeria on Channel 3. He was subsequently fired from his radio job because of similar articles written for Le Soir d'Algerie, even though they were written under a pen name. According to Belhadjouja, the prosecutor had recommended the maximum sentence of ten years' imprisonment, particularly because of the flippant and insulting tone of the article.

3. The new sentences, if implemented, will bring to eight the number of Algerian journalists who are sentenced to prison or currently in prison. Four other journalists have also been sentenced to imprisonment and are awaiting appeal (reftel).

ERDMAN